

- 1969 Washington: no. 3.  
 1974 Broos: 192–218, repro. fig. 19.  
 1975 NGA: 286–287, repro.  
 1976 Walker: 273–273, no. 359, color repro.  
 1977 Bolten and Bolten-Rempt: 186, no. 264, repro.  
 1981 Chrosicki: 441–448.  
 1984 Wheelock: 12, color repro.  
 1984/1985 Schwartz: 200, no. 219, color repro. (also 1985 English ed.).  
 1985 NGA: 330, repro.  
 1986 Tümpel: 197, color repro., 406, no. 137.  
 1986 Sutton: 312.  
 1986 Guillaud and Guillaud: 311, no. 366, color repro.  
 1986 Hermesdorf: 35–49.  
 1988 Wheelock: 214–245, fig. 9–28.  
 1982–*Corpus*, 3 (1989): 242–247, reprints.  
 1990 Schneider: 68, 69, repro., 70, 95, 154, 171, 233  
 note 80.  
 1991 Le Bihan: 362.  
 1991 Grimm: 95, pl. 51 (color detail), 97, fig. 179.  
 1992 NGA: 124, color repro.

1937.1.73 (73)

## Rembrandt van Rijn and Workshop

### *An Old Lady with a Book*

1637

Oil on canvas, 109.7 x 91.5 (43¼ x 36)

Andrew W. Mellon Collection

#### Inscriptions

On the bottom left: *Rembr[an]dt. / f. 1637*

**Technical Notes:** The support, a medium-weight, tightly and plain-woven fabric, is relined with the tacking margins trimmed. Cusping is present on all sides, suggesting the original dimensions have been retained. The double ground consists of a thin, red lower layer followed by a very thin, gray upper layer.<sup>1</sup> Paint is applied as thin pastes in dark passages and thicker paste in the lights, with individual brushstrokes blended wet into wet. Visible in the x-radiograph surrounding the head are the limits of a rather large reserve left for this area.

Losses are found in the signature and date, to the left of the head, and along the edges. Minor flaking has occurred at crackle junctures, and the pale halo around the figure is moderately abraded. The painting underwent treatment in 1981–1983 at which time early linings were removed, the painting was relined, and discolored varnish and repaints were removed.

**Provenance:** Johan van der Marck, Amsterdam; (sale, 25 August 1773, no. 259). M. Thélusson, Paris; (sale, Paris, 1 December 1777, no. 17).<sup>2</sup> Montesquieu (sale, Paris, 9 March 1788, no. 45); purchased by Lebrun. C. A. de Calonne (sale, London, 23 March 1795, no. 38); purchased by John Julius Angerstein, London; by gift to Sir Thomas Lawrence [1769–1830], London.<sup>3</sup> John Allnut, London, (sale, London, 18–20 June 1863, no. 502); purchased by François Nieuwenhuys,

Brussels. Louis Lebeuf de Montgermont, Paris; Prince de Broglie, Paris, by 1920; (Duveen Brothers, London and New York, in 1920); sold November 1924 to Andrew W. Mellon, Pittsburgh and Washington; deeded 28 December 1934 to The A. W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pittsburgh.

**Exhibited:** British Institution, London, 1861, no. 123. *Paintings by Old Masters from Pittsburgh Collections*, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, 1925, no. 60. *Paintings by Rembrandt*, Detroit Institute of Arts, 1930, no. 36. Washington 1969, no. 4.

ALTHOUGH the identity of this formidable woman is not known, her black cap indicates that she is in mourning and is probably a widow. Her stern demeanor, wide-wheel ruff collar, and the Bible she holds in her lap suggest that she was a conservative member of Dutch society and dedicated to her religious beliefs. Despite the bold execution, the portrait is remarkably subdued. The sitter does not communicate directly with the viewer either through a gaze or gesture, but rather is lost in her thoughts as she ponders the words of the Bible she has just read.<sup>4</sup> As she stares outward but looks inward, she gently fingers the clasp of the Bible with one hand while holding her spectacles between the fingers of her other.

Because such black, fur-trimmed costumes are found in Dutch painting from the mid-1630s until the late 1650s, the dating of this imposing painting has posed particular problems. Until a date was discovered in the lower left at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was generally described in an all-inclusive way as belonging to Rembrandt's "best period." First read as 1643,<sup>5</sup> the date was later believed to be 164[7].<sup>6</sup> The confusion is understandable because damage in this area of the painting obliterates a portion of both the signature and the date. The restoration of the painting in 1983, however, revealed that the date should be read as 1637. While the damage does affect both the "6" and the "3," enough of each number survives to identify them (see Appendix). The signature and date are integral with the paint structure and are of a type characteristic of the late 1630s.

This information is of some consequence when discussing the attribution of the work, which has been rejected in recent years by both Gerson and Schwartz.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, while the execution does not relate easily with Rembrandt's paintings from the late 1640s, close comparisons can be made with other women's portraits from the late 1630s, in particular *Alotte Adriaensdr.* of 1639 in the Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam (fig. 1).<sup>8</sup> Not only are the costumes of both figures similar, but also the sure



Rembrandt van Rijn and Workshop, *An Old Lady with a Book*, 1937.1.73

modeling of features through a variety of short, unblended brushstrokes. Among those areas of the face that best bear the characteristics of artistic approach are the articulation of the eyes, the modeling of folds just below the eyes, the formation of the mouth, and the way the drawn-back hair is indicated with thin black strokes drawn from the forehead to the hair. Since the features of the somewhat older woman in the Washington painting are rougher and the thrust of light on the face stronger, the brushwork is freer than in the Rotterdam portrait. In both works, nevertheless, Rembrandt used his paint to suggest at once the structure of the face and the patterns of light and dark that accent the form.

The woman's hands and the Bible in *An Old Lady with a Book* are likewise modeled with bold strokes and great surety. While their forms are quite geometric and their positions carefully conceived, Rembrandt has suggested the nuances of texture and modeling with great sensitivity. The sheen of the flesh as it is accented by the light seems to glow from within, while the metallic corners of the book glisten with specular reflections. Also remarkable is the subtle translucence of the eyeglasses, which reveal the diffused images of the thumb and finger beneath them.

Fig. 1. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Alotte Adriaensdr.*, 1639, oil on panel, Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen



Fig. 2. Detail of x-radiograph of head in 1937.1.73

The surety of Rembrandt's modeling of form is particularly evident in the x-radiograph (fig. 2). Here also the distribution of lead white is compatible with that of other portraits from the mid- to late 1630s. No pentimenti are evident as Rembrandt seems to have worked directly on the canvas with great confidence of his intent. As is evident from the surface but also from the x-radiograph, the collar is painted very densely. Technical analysis indicates that it was executed in two layers. This technique was probably developed to help convey the translucent quality of the material. Folds along the edges of the material were articulated with strokes of gray for the shadows and strokes of white for the accented portions.

Despite stylistic connections with Rembrandt's work from the late 1630s, the figure is unusually stiff and formal in its presentation. Gerson complained that the hands were "without expression," but the same criticism could be more aptly applied to the upright position of the woman as she sits rigidly in the armchair.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, compared to most Rembrandt sitters, she seems rather remote. In part, Rembrandt's characterization must be seen in response to the personality of the patron, an intangible in the process of portrait painting that can never be adequately assessed. The woman's restrained de-

meanor must also be understood within the iconographic content of this work. Unlike most of Rembrandt's subjects the woman does not make eye contact with the viewer. His intent was to emphasize how the word of the Bible has made an impact on the woman's state of being rather than to enliven her form with momentary expression or gesture.

The fascinating conceit of depicting the woman contemplating a written text is consistent with Rembrandt's interest in extending the limits of portraiture during the late 1630s and early 1640s. Just how remarkable the concept is can be seen through a comparison with Solomon Koninck's *Portrait of an Elderly Lady*, 1634 (fig. 3). Here, while all of the components of the painting are comparable, the woman has posed as though she has been interrupted from her text rather than immersed in her thoughts. Rembrandt's interest in demonstrating the effect of words on a sitter's mind can also be found in his graphic work from the 1630s and early 1640s, in particular his etched portrait of Jan Cornelis Silvius, 1633, and his etching *Man at a Desk Wearing a Cross and Chain*, 1641.<sup>10</sup> In painting, this conceit culminated in 1641 in his magnificent *Portrait of Anslo and*

*His Wife*, 1641 (Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, inv. no. 828L), where he conveyed the impact of the preacher's words through the quiet, reflective mood of the woman.

Despite the inventiveness of the portrait concept and the painterly qualities evident in the face, it seems probable that Rembrandt relegated the costume, chair, and background to a studio assistant. The brushwork in those portions of the painting is comparatively uninspired. A close comparison of the treatment of the millstone ruff on this portrait and that of *Alotte Adriaensdr.* (fig. 1), for example, demonstrates that this collar is executed with less sensitivity to the delicate nuances of light and form. The result is that the translucency of the material is rendered less illusionistically than it is in the Rotterdam portrait. A small but telling detail confirms that the collar was executed after the head was completely finished: a stroke of white paint overlaps the woman's right cheek.

It may well be, then, that Rembrandt, after devising the concept for the portrait, blocked in the form in his customary manner, executed the head and the hands, and then passed on the unfinished canvas to an assistant to bring it to completion. Although this pupil cannot be identified, a strong candidate would be Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680), a trained artist who had moved from Dordrecht to Amsterdam to work as an apprentice and assistant with Rembrandt between the years of about 1636 to 1641.<sup>11</sup> While it is difficult to determine which works Bol actually executed during those years, in his later career he painted a large number of portraits as well as biblical and mythological scenes. One portrait that has been convincingly attributed to him from the 1640s, and which is comparable to *An Old Lady with a Book*, is the *Portrait of Elizabeth Jacobsdr. Bas* (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. A714).<sup>12</sup> While the brushwork in the costume is somewhat rougher and bolder in the Washington painting because of the need to paint in Rembrandt's style, the bodies of both women have a massive yet static character that is quite similar, as is seen, for example, in the way the fur-edged jackets fall across the women's laps. Similar also is the manner in which the shadows fall across the women's millruffs. Finally, the oblique perspective of the circular form of the chair arm is identical.

Fig. 3. Solomon Koninck, *Portrait of an Elderly Lady*, 1634, oil on panel, Hopetoun House Preservation Trust, near Edinburgh



#### Notes

1. Pigment analysis and microscopy reports of both paint and ground layers are available in the Scientific Research department (17 July 1981, 31 July 1981, 3 August 1981, 7 August 1981, 18 May 1983).

2. Smith 1829-1842, 7: 163, no. 505, includes a provenance listing: "Collection of an Artist, 1783." This reference, however, could not be verified.

3. For the circumstances of the gift, see Williams 1831, 1: 129. I would like to thank Burton Fredericksen, director of the Getty Provenance Index, for bringing this reference to my attention (letter 5 February 1988 in NGA curatorial records).

4. It is clear that she has finished reading the Bible since the back cover is on top, the normal position of a book when one closes it.

5. See, for example, HdG 1907-1927, 6: 401, no. 876.

6. Rosenberg 1948, 1: 45.

7. Gerson/Bredius 1969, 578, no. 362, suggest associations with Gerbrandt van den Eeckhout (1621-1674). Schwartz 1984/1985, 380, rejects the painting in his concordance without explanation. Ernst van de Wetering (personal communication, 1991) has indicated to me that he does not accept the attribution of this painting to Rembrandt.

8. *Corpus* 1982-, 3: 321-327, A132. The painting is generally in a poor state of preservation with the exception of the area around the face. The signature and date of 1639 are not considered by the RRP to be authentic, but the date is accepted as appropriate on the basis of style.

9. Gerson/Bredius 1969, 578, no. 362.

10. For illustrations of these two etchings, see Münz 1952, 2: 54 and 61.

11. For an excellent overview of Bol's work see Blankert 1982b; and also Sumowski 1983, 1: 282-425.

12. For an extended discussion of the various attributions that have been given to this painting and convincing reasons for the attribution to Bol, see Van Thiel in Berlin 1991, 322-327, no. 65.

#### References

- 1829-1842 Smith, 7 (1836): 163, no. 505.  
1831 Williams, 1:129.  
1858 Blanc: 168.  
1897-1906 Bode, 4 (1900): 35, 168, no. 288, repro.  
1906 Rosenberg: not cited (1908 ed.: 590, no. 267).  
1907-1927 HdG, 6 (1916): 401, no. 876.  
1923 Meldrum: 195, pl. 236.  
1924 Knackfuss: 62.  
1926 Hymans: no. 47.  
1930 Schmidt-Degener: no. 53, repro.  
1931 Valentiner: no. 79.  
1935 Bredius: 16, 362 repro. (also 1935 English ed.: 15, 362 repro.).  
1937 Cortissoz: 39, repro. opp. 38.  
1941 Berenson and Valentiner: no. 196, repro.  
1943 Benesch: 26, fig. 13, repro., 33 (reprinted in Benesch 1970, 1: 142-143, fig. 116, repro.).  
1948 Rosenberg, 1: 45; 2: pl. 65 (also 1964 rev. ed.: 77-78, fig. 65, repro. 76).  
1949 Mellon: 83.  
1960 Roger-Marx: 201, repro. 200, no. 61.  
1965 NGA: 109, no. 73.  
1968 NGA: 97, no. 73, repro.  
1966 Bauch: 26, no. 508.  
1968 Gerson: 348-349, no. 264, repro., 498.  
1969 Gerson/Bredius: 578, no. 362, repro. 283.  
1975 NGA: 284, no. 73, repro. 285.  
1976 Walker: 279, no. 368, repro. 278.  
1976 Fowles: 137.

1984-1985 Schwartz: 380 (also 1985 English ed.: 380).

1985 NGA: 328, repro. 238.

1986 Tümpel: 241, repro.

1990 The Hague: 391.

1942.9.62 (658)

## Rembrandt van Rijn

### *The Mill*

1645/1648

Oil on canvas, 87.6 x 105.6 (34½ x 41⅞)

Widener Collection

**Technical Notes:** The original support is a fine-weight, tightly woven, plain-weave fabric, lined with the tacking margins trimmed. Cusping, which extends 7 cm into the painting, is present along the bottom edge, indicating that it is original. No cusping exists along the top or sides of the painting, which would seem to indicate that these edges have been cut. The right edge, however, has a puzzling characteristic: the paint ends approximately 1 cm short of the edge, although the ground extends until the edge. Whether the paint had been left unfinished along this edge, or whether the painting is not, in fact, trimmed, cannot be established with certainty.

A double ground is present, consisting of a reddish brown lower layer followed by a yellowish gray upper layer.<sup>1</sup> A thin black or dark brown underpaint layer is present under the mill. Paint is applied thinly and fluidly in the dark areas and thickly in the sky, water, and foliage, with broad brushmarking and low impasto.

Numerous changes and reworkings by the artist are evident. The x-radiograph shows that a reserve was left for the mill, the contour of the hill, a bridge that originally crossed the water from the promontory to the right edge, and its reflection in the water below. Cross-sections indicate that the span of the bridge was blocked in with a black or dark brown layer of paint. In executing the painting, the profile of the hill was lowered on the left and the bridge and reflection were eliminated. At that time a second layer of blue was added to the sky. The water was reworked and the boat and oarsman introduced. Striations in the trees show the paint was reworked while still wet. Infrared reflectography also shows the adjustment to the hill, with a pentimento of a form, perhaps a building, on top. Other pentimenti indicate slight adjustments to the left side of the mill and the top blade position, a lowering of the church tower, and the substitution of the small crouched figure for a large standing figure on the promontory.

The painting is in excellent condition, with only minor flake losses along the edges, and a small loss and abrasion in the upper left corner. Dark gray stains in the sky may be due to the discoloration of the pigment smalt. Small residues of hardened old varnishes and retouchings are present.

In 1976, a small slit in the lower left corner was repaired. Treatment was carried out in 1977-1979 to consolidate flaking paint, remove the old lining and replace it, and remove discolored varnish and retouching.